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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 001185

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TAGS: PGOV KDEM KPKO CG ELECTIONS
SUBJECT: DRC ELECTIONS: UDPS A WANING THREAT IN THE KASAI

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Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) Summary: The opposition Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) -- which continues to boycott the DRC's July 30 elections -- remains a dominant presence in its traditional strongholds of Western and Eastern Kasai provinces. UDPS support and influence, however, are slowly declining in the Kasais, as many potential voters consider the party more a nuisance than a constructive critic of the electoral process. Moreover, many observers say they believe the UDPS no longer poses a significant threat in terms of its ability to generate civil unrest, as the party cannot mobilize the number of protesters it once could. Consequently, voter participation in the Kasais for the DRC's general elections is expected to be higher than it was during the December constitutional referendum, despite UDPS threats attempting to prevent candidates from campaigning and to intimidate voters against heading to the polls. End summary.

MISINFORMATION STRATEGY

12. (C) Throughout the last months of the DRC's transitional government, the UDPS's strategy towards elections has focused primarily on attempts to spread misinformation and to discredit the electoral process -- all with the goal of sowing doubt and mistrust among potential voters. UDPS rhetoric is largely based on the party's ardent belief that its president, Etienne Tshisekedi, has been "excluded" from taking part in elections. Consequently, without UDPS participation, so the party's argument goes, elections cannot be considered fair or valid. UDPS officials both in Kinshasa and the Kasais have repeatedly warned that if elections take place without the UDPS, there will certainly be violence throughout the country after July 30. Brandard Tshimbombo, the provincial UDPS president in Western Kasai, said if the UDPS is not brought into the process, the DRC will inevitably become "another Iraq" and descend into violence and chaos. Tshimbombo said the only way to avoid that outcome is to

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renegotiate the entire transitional government structure and restart the voter registration process. (Comment: Either suggestion, if followed, would result in indefinite delays of elections themselves. End comment.)

13. (C) Targets of the UDPS's jeremiads have included the transitional government, the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), and the international community -- all of which, in

the view of the party, have conspired to keep the UDPS outside the electoral process and the Congolese from electing the leaders they want. The arguments often raised by the UDPS against the electoral process, though, are more often distractions than legitimate criticisms. For example, Tshimbombo said the transitional government has poorly

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organized the elections and has rigged the vote in advance to ensure President Kabila is elected. Tshimbombo said the fact the CEI printed five million "extra" ballots clearly proves the Commission is trying to commit electoral fraud. The UDPS provincial leader added that the international community is complicit with the CEI's machinations, as it is trying to "impose choices" on Congolese voters and has "already chosen" its candidate for president (i.e., Kabila). For each example, however, neither Tshimbombo nor any other provincial UDPS official could offer any proof. In addition, UDPS members simply chose to ignore the explanations given by Independent Electoral President Abbe Apollinaire Malu Malu. The UDPS (as well as its allies) is thus laying the groundwork for challenging the outcome of the elections, essentially pre-judging results before they are even known. Even before elections take place, UDPS officials in Mbuji Mayi said the party will boycott the new DRC government, regardless of who is elected.

POISONED ATMOSPHERE

¶4. (C) In the Kasais, the continuing opposition stance of the UDPS has effectively created a poisoned atmosphere and a great amount of distrust concerning the electoral process. Already in Western and Eastern Kasai there is a great deal of sympathy for Tshisekedi and the opposition party; the criticisms of the government and the CEI merely serve to reinforce that existing mentality. Many Kasaians PolOff spoke

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to during a recent trip to both provinces demonstrated the depth of those sentiments. Monsignor Marcel Maduila, the bishop of the Catholic Church in Kananga, said the international community and "Kinshasa" (i.e., the transitional government) was trying to "impose democracy" in the Kasais against the wishes of the population. Maduila said he believed the electoral "game" has been played by the international community, and Kabila has already been chosen as the winner. Members of civil society in Tshikapa said the electoral process is not inclusive since the UDPS is not taking part, and therefore elections cannot be considered legitimate.

THREATS AND INTIMIDATION

¶5. (C) The UDPS has, however, backed up its anti-elections rhetoric with tactics of intimidation and harassment in both Kasais. Citizens in both provinces largely stayed home June 30 out of fear of reprisals from UDPS militants, who had called for a "ville morte" to protest against the "illegal" continuation of the transitional government. MONUC officials said in addition to some UDPS supporters tearing down campaign banners, some legislative candidates have been physically harassed in Mbuji Mayi and Kananga during the past two weeks. On July 1 in Kananga, UDPS officials posted a message outside their headquarters announcing that the electoral campaign had been canceled and anyone engaging in political activity would "face consequences." Kananga civil society coordinator Alex Mukanya said some of his colleagues engaged in voter education campaigns have been harassed and threatened by UDPS supporters. More commonly, particularly in Mbuji Mayi, the UDPS has called for a "ville morte" nearly every day since June 30, bringing economic activity in many sectors of the city to a halt.

¶ 16. (C) In recent days, UDPS supporters have engaged in slightly more violent activity. President Kabila made his first campaign visit to Mbuji Mayi July 23 and was reportedly not well-received in the city. As the president and his motorcade were traveling from the airport into the city, onlookers threw rocks at the passing cars of the president's security detail; a similar incident took place the following day. This response, however, was more a rejection of Kabila himself than the electoral process. Several other presidential candidates -- including Vice Presidents Jean-Pierre Bemba and Azarias Ruberwa, Joseph O lenghankoy, and Eugene Diomi -- have all campaigned in the Kasais, and none were stoned by the local population.

RHETORIC TAKING ITS TOLL

¶ 17. (C) These constant refrains of opposition and criticism, however, are beginning to take their toll on average Kasaians. The population can clearly see the electoral campaign is underway, even without the UDPS taking part. Many Congolese PolOff spoke to in the Kasais said they are just now realizing the UDPS leadership made a significant mistake in boycotting elections, and the party's strategy has been of no benefit to Kasaians. As members of Mbuji Mayi's civil society said, the realization is slowly sinking in that elections will take place, and the UDPS has squandered an opportunity to be elected into power to help improve life in the Kasais. Moreover, the economic impact of the UDPS's "ville morte" strategy is beginning to have negative consequences. MONUC officials explained that many citizens have been unable to go to the market to buy basic necessities because the UDPS has effectively shut down business in some parts of the city. MONUC-Mbuji Mayi Head of Office Mamady Kouyate said the political motivations and arguments of the UDPS are now far less a concern for the average citizen than fulfilling the needs of everyday life.

¶ 18. (C) Most observers in the Kasais said they believe the UDPS's support is slowly waning in the region. Jean Beya of the PPRD in Kananga said the population has grown tired of the UDPS being in "permanent opposition," and that the party itself is only accustomed to saying "no" to everything. Kouyate of MONUC-Mbuji Mayi added that the UDPS is little more than a "nuisance" than a menace to the elections, despite its threats and rhetoric. A Congolese woman who was participating in an IFES-sponsored voter education seminar in Mbuji Mayi said it is now the UDPS that is keeping the Congolese from establishing a democracy, not anyone else. As

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reported septel, while election campaigning has been slow to start in the Kasais, the major political parties are nonetheless actively contesting the two provinces. Moreover, despite UDPS appeals for a boycott of the vote, many Kasaians PolOff spoke to privately admitted that while they sympathized with the UDPS position, they nonetheless wanted to vote and planned on doing so July 30.

SUSPICIONS REMAIN

¶ 19. (C) Still, many in the Kasais fear what the UDPS might try to do to upset elections or the immediate post-electoral period. The UDPS has had a history in the region of inciting civil unrest. Of particular concern is the UDPS practice of paying "shegues" (street children and youths) to instigate violence, burn cars, break shop windows, and harass the population. Western Kasai Governor Tshiongo Tshibikubula said he was especially concerned that UDPS officials will try to use the shegues to intimidate voters on election day in an effort to keep participation low.

¶10. (C) MONUC officials in Kananga expressed similar concerns about the potential for UDPS-instigated violence, but added that such possibilities are far less likely, as the party does not enjoy the support it once did. Officials with MONUC and civil society said the UDPS has been largely unable to mobilize a significant number of protesters into the streets to demonstrate against elections, and could barely manage to assemble 1,000 people for a rally on June 30. Congolese military officers in Kananga and Mbuji Mayi said as well they did not consider the UDPS to be a major security concern for the elections. General Obedi Rwibasira, commander of the 4th Military Region in Mbuji Mayi, said the population was truly "tired" of the delays and rhetoric of the UDPS, and thus was not generally inclined to take to the streets to support the party in its boycott of elections. Obedi added that more than anything, the UDPS represents the "specter" of violence, but does not have the means or support to cause widespread unrest. Governor Tshibikubula noted that compared even to last year, there is far less fear of what the UDPS can do to create disorder.

COMMENT: NOT THE FORCE IT ONCE WAS

¶11. (C) UDPS influence in the Kasais is still considerable, but the depth and breath of its support is noticeably diminishing in the region. While the party still enjoys some support in certain sectors, more and more Kasaians are beginning to realize Tshisekedi's errors. Consequently, while the UDPS will try to enforce an electoral boycott, the party will not be successful in keeping all voters away from the polls. Voter participation in the Kasais will no doubt be lower than the rest of the country (save Kinshasa) due to UDPS influence and propaganda, but turnout is nonetheless expected to be slightly higher than the December constitutional referendum (41 percent in Western Kasai and 33 percent in Eastern Kasai) -- a sign that Kasaians want to participate in the democratic process. The UDPS's capacity to create widespread turmoil in the Kasais has been overestimated. There will almost certainly be security incidents in Mbuji Mayi and Kananga on and around July 30, but such events will be isolated affairs largely confined to the cities themselves. But as many observers have noted, a general fatigue with the UDPS approach is setting in, and it remains questionable whether the party can mobilize the thousands of people into the street it once could. More and more, as the elections become inevitable and the party continues its opposition, the UDPS is increasingly marginalized as a political force nationwide and in the Kasais. End comment.

MEECE